

## REPRESENTATIVE BUREAUCRACY: THE MALAYSIAN PERSPECTIVE

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### ABSTRACT

Since being coined by Kingsley in 1944, representative bureaucracy has become a major concern in the study of public administration. The theory of representative bureaucracy developed at a time when there was concern about unelected officials holding important positions in government agencies. This article examines the development and representativeness of the Malaysian civil service. Malay, Chinese and Indian are the three major ethnic groups in the country. In 2010, the country population consists of 55.1% Malays, 24.3% Chinese, 7.4% Indians and 13.2% others. However, the civil service has as high as 76.2% Malay but only 6.0% Chinese and 4.1% Indian representations. Racial preference in recruitment and promotion is said to be the main reason behind the increasingly mono-ethnic of the civil service. Traditionally, males were over-represented in the civil service at all levels. However, the trend has been reversed in recent years due to the continuing preponderance of female graduates and hence applicants for government jobs. Therefore, the concern over the representativeness of the Malaysian bureaucracy is less on gender but more on ethnicity representations. This article argues that increasing the representativeness of the bureaucracy would ensure equitable responsiveness, strengthen capacity and legitimacy of the government in the diverse society.

**KEYWORDS:** Representative Bureaucracy, Civil Service, Public Administration, Diversity, Racial Preference

### INTRODUCTION

Malaysia practices parliamentary democracy with constitutional monarchy. The *Yang di-Pertuan Agong*, or the King, is the head of state of Malaysia. The King is appointed by the hereditary Malay rulers from among their number for every five years or when a vacancy occurs. The Parliament of Malaysia is based on the Westminster system. The bicameral parliament consists of the House of Representatives and the Senate. The federal government of Malaysia adopts the principle of separation of power and has three branches, i.e. executive, legislature and judiciary. Executive power is vested in the cabinet led by the prime minister. The cabinet appointed by the prime minister from among the members of Parliament with consent of the King. The cabinet is a council of ministers that are accountable collectively to the Parliament. The composition of the cabinet and the number of portfolios depend mainly on the wishes of the prime minister at the time. Shortly after the general elections of 2013, on 16 May, the Prime Minister Najib Razak appointed 32 cabinet ministers and 26 deputy ministers. The latest cabinet reshuffle was on 26 June 2014 where the cabinet expanded into 35 cabinet ministers and 27 deputy ministers. The Malaysian civil service is placed under the executive.

The Malaysia Civil Service is formerly known as the Malayan Civil Service inherited its legacy from the British Public Service. Its establishment could be traced back to the late 1700s when the British East India Company acquired Penang. The Malaysian public service has undergone significant fundamental changes over the last 57 years since independence. The Northcote-Trevelyan Report of 1845 laid down the public service ethos which emphasised a politically neutral civil service which loyal to the government of the day; a professional public service which provides impartial and

appropriate advices to the sitting government; and the public service should provide continuous stability when there is a change in government (Prime Minister's Office, n.d.). This basic tenet sets the tone of the Malaysian civil service.

Statistics show that civil servants account for over 10% of the country's labour force and over 4% of the country's population over the years of 1990-2010 (Woo, 2011, p. 4 & 2013, p. 406). At the end of 2010, the number of civil servants stood at 1,420,387 (Public Service Department, 2010, p. 173)<sup>1</sup> and the number of civil servants has amounted to 1.5 million in May 2014 (Office of the Chief Secretary to the Government, 2014). Indeed, the Malaysian government is the single largest employer of the country. The public service is not only about the distribution of (public) employment opportunity among ethnic groups, it is also "the main instrument for formulating and implementing government policies and thus importantly affects what government does in all sectors" (Lim, 2013, p. 200). Considering civil servants have great discretionally power in influencing policy making and distributing resources, the large size of the Malaysian civil service has raised concern about its representativeness and hence equitable responsiveness to all segments in its plural society.

This article examines the historical background, development and the representativeness of the Malaysian civil service. It is divided into five sections. The following section discusses the theory and importance of a representative bureaucracy. Examination on the evolution of the representativeness of the civil service in terms of gender and ethnic groups would then follows. Section four investigates factors which affect the representativeness of minority groups in the civil service. The last section is the conclusion of the article.

## **THE THEORY OF REPRESENTATIVE BUREAUCRACY AND ITS IMPORTANCE**

Since being coined by J. Donald Kingsley in 1944, representative bureaucracy has become a major concern in the study and practice of public administration and administrative policy making. The theory of representative bureaucracy developed at a time when there was concern about unelected officials holding important positions in government agencies. Civil servants exercise considerable discretion in executing governmental programmes handed down by elected officials. These discretions allowed them to make choices which would affect the impact to the governmental decisions. Up to an extent, these discretions allowed civil servants to determine who gets what, when and how, the standard lay definition of politics proposed by Harold Dwight Lasswell.

Bureaucrats are not directly accountable to the people, however, they have huge amount of discretionary power within the broad policy parameters and this is exactly the part where the incongruity between democratic principles and implementation occurred. Due to the powerful role collectively played by civil servants, and "the degree to which all democratic institutions are representative is a matter of prime significance" (Kingsley, 1944, pp. 282-283), scholars and practitioners have actively advocated the essentiality of representative bureaucracy in a diverse society. It is argued that, at the minimum, the government administrative and governing structure should recognize the diversity of its people.

The importance of representative bureaucracy has been more precisely defined in recent years with the distinction between passive and active representation made by Mosher (1968, p. 13). Passive representation refers to the mere presence of civil servants of various social groups. A passively representative bureaucracy, i.e. one that reflects the demographic composition of the society or population it serves, has "symbolic" importance. It promotes the legitimacy of the bureaucracy and the government in that diverse groups would have a greater sense of identification and being fairly

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<sup>1</sup> Included are civil servants working in the federal, state, and local governments, and also those working in federal and state statutory bodies.

served when civil servants are visibly and sufficiently diverse.

Active representation occurs when civil servants act in ways that increase substantive benefits for their social group. As Nachmias and Rosenbloom (1973, p. 595) point out, “one of the major problems confronting anyone who attempts to deal with the concept of representative bureaucracy lies in discerning the relationship between passive and active representation.” Various studies in America have established the occurrence of active representation by showing that greater passive representation of racial minorities and women leads to greater substantive benefits for these social groups. Thus Meier (1993) finds active representation by Latino school principals and teachers in Florida school districts. Selden (1997) finds active representation by African American, Hispanic, and Asian American county supervisors in district offices of the Farmers Home Administration. Wilkins and Keiser (2001) find active representation by female supervisors in child support agencies. Meier and Nicholson-Crotty (2002) find active representation by female police officers in the 60 largest metropolitan counties in the United States.

Instead of attributing the substantive effects simply to active representation, Lim (2006b) attempts to identify the various “sources of substantive effects” or simply reasons why civil servants increase substantive benefits for their social groups. Some of these reasons lie in individual civil servants and are called “direct” sources of substantive effects, as they lead civil servants to behave in ways that directly increase benefits for their social group. This behaviour of civil servants is what scholars call active representation. Lim goes on to argue that civil servants from a given social group can also indirectly increase benefits for their social group through their effects on the behaviour of civil servants from other social groups and of potential clients from their own social group. These effects constitute indirect sources of substantive effects.<sup>2</sup>

In the extending theory and research on representation bureaucracy, scholars highlight the importance of testing representation theory at the individual level (Theobald & Haider-Markel, 2009; Bradburry & Kellough, 2011). This is to ensure bureaucratic outcomes are not the result of coproduction in the sense that both the bureaucrats and their clients have independent effects on those outcomes as argued by Lim (2006b). In general, results show that investigation on representation theory at the individual level support the occurrence of a connection between the presence of diversity in the public workforce and the representation of minority interests. Based on the above discussion, representation in the bureaucracy can have symbolic as well as substantive effects for social groups. Hence, having a representative bureaucracy is essential for ensuring equitable responsiveness to all social groups.

## THE MALAYSIAN CIVIL SERVICE

The purpose of this section is to ascertain how representative bureaucracy evolves in the Malaysian civil service system from the British colonial era until present.

The obvious attractions of Malay Peninsula to British were its economic potential in the production of mines (tin especially), tropical plantation crops (rubber and palm oil especially) and other natural resources. A large number of Chinese and Indian labourers were brought in by the British to meet the colonial economy’s needs. In fact, large-scale immigration of Chinese and Indians was one of the important characteristics of the Malayan population growth prior to World War II. The number of the immigrants was so huge that they formed almost half of the Malayan’s population in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In order to maintain law and order which aligned to the British economic and political activities in Malaya,

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<sup>2</sup> Lim identifies three direct sources (partiality, shared values and beliefs, and empathic understanding) and five indirect sources (check, restraint, resocialization, demand inducement, and co-production inducement) of substantive effects. For details, see Lim (2006b, pp. 194-197).

the Malayan Civil Service (MCS) was introduced formally in January 1921 with a total establishment of 180 posts. The MCS had a top-down structure and it was highly elitism where the candidates for the posts must be “natural-born British subjects of pure European descent on both sides” (PTD Alumni, 2012). To ensure the smooth running of the MCS which fits their economic and empire needs, the British established the Malay Administrative Service (MAS) to co-opt the indigenous leadership and to win over supports of the elite Malays. The inclusion of Malays in the bureaucracy was to help legitimize the ruling of British in Malaya, and later, also as part of the colonial’s strategy for the gradual handover of power (Chin, 2011, p. 143; Siddiquee, 2013, p. 39). However, Malays would never be at the most senior levels, and all the top posts were reserved for the whites. The MCS created during the colonial times was succeeded by PTD (*Perkhidmatan Tadbir dan Diplomatik*, the Malaysian Administrative and Diplomatic Service) after independence. The main features of the MCS such as its prominent role in administration, its prestigious status in the civil service, not only preserve but enhance by its successor, the PTD. The PTD provides almost all the senior administrative officials at the federal and state levels.

The British made no effort either to include the Chinese and Indian immigrants into the civil service system or integrate them into local living environment. These immigrants were expected to return to their homelands once they earned enough from the Malaya Peninsula. However, they stayed instead. This was because majority of them did not earn enough to go back. They built their own insular communities in Malaya. This marked the beginning of the country’s multiracial ethnography. The exclusion of the Chinese and Indians into the MCS forcing these immigrants moving into the private and commerce sectors and began to dominate the sectors. The insecure feeling of domination by non-Malays in the private sector drove the Malay elites moved closer to the colonial officials, and hence to the civil service.

After independence, the legacy of British colonial administrative system remains strong in the Malaysian administrative system. The top-down approach in decision making, the prominent role of PTD in the government and the characteristic of elitism are still prevalent in today’s Malaysian civil service (Putucheary, 1987, p. 107; Siddiquee, 2013, p.16). In addition, according to Chin (2011, p. 153), two other negative legacies of the colonial era civil service of racism and the exclusion of the Chinese and Indians from the civil service, especially its top posts, although for different reasons, also continues until today.

Representative bureaucracy might not be a consideration of the civil service when it was first introduced in Malaya by the British colonial government. However, today, the representativeness of the bureaucracy has been an issue of concern in the multiracial country. Demographically the three major ethnic groups in Malaysia are Malay, Chinese and Indian.<sup>3</sup> The population of Malaysia has increased from 10,881,773 in 1970 to 26,784,965 in 2010 (Economic Planning Unit, 1970 & 2010), an increase of 146.2%. Table 1 shows ethnic compositions of the country’s population in 1970, 2000, 2005 and 2010. Malay population has increased from 44.3% in 1970 to 55.1% in 2010. Whereas, Chinese population has decreased from 34.5% to 24.3% and Indian population has dropped from 9.0% to 7.4% over the same period. Although the numbers of these two major minority ethnic groups steadily declined over the years, they remained significant in the country demographic.

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<sup>3</sup> Apart from the three major ethnic groups, in Sabah and Sarawak, respectively there are at least 30 and 40 ethnic/sub-ethnic groups which most of them are recognized as indigenous people.

**Table 1: The Malaysian Population by Ethnic Groups, 1970, 2000, 2005 & 2010**

	1970 <sup>a</sup>		2000 <sup>a</sup>		2005 <sup>b</sup>		2010 <sup>a</sup>	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Malay	4 822 263	44.3	11 785 875	53.4	13 190 200	54.1	14 749 378	55.1
Chinese	3 737 225	34.3	5 761 723	26.1	6 154 900	25.3	6 520 559	24.3
Indian	977 922	9.0	1 696 137	7.7	1 834 800	7.5	1 969 343	7.4
Others*	1 344 363	12.4	2 838 045	12.8	3 182 100	13.1	3 545 685	13.2
<b>Total</b>	<b>10 881 773</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>22 081 780</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>24 362 000</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>26 784 965</b>	<b>100</b>

\*Mainly other *bumiputras* (natives)

**Sources:** <sup>a</sup>Economic Planning Unit (1970, 2000 & 2010)

<sup>b</sup>Department of Statistics (2005, p. 37)

In the early years immediately after the establishment of Malaya (later Malaysia), most Chinese and Indians (who were brought into the country by the British government) were not so concerned about if they were sufficiently represented in the civil service. Probably similar to what has been expected by the colonial government, they themselves were also thinking of returning to their homelands after earning enough. However, times have changed. For Chinese and Indians who were born and bred in the country after independence, similar to those Malays and other indigenous, they also contribute to the development of the society, pay taxes to the government, and show their loyalty to the country and the King. In short, they have similar experience and feeling towards Malaysia like their Malay and other indigenous counterparts. To them, their homeland is Malaysia, not China or India. Therefore, it is not surprising, indeed reasonable and legitimate, for them to ask for equitable treatment and response from the government to address their needs. They started to show their concern towards the representativeness of the civil service. In 1970, there were only 75,875 civil servants in Peninsular Malaysia. However, the number increased to 899,250 in 2005 and at the end of 2009, the number of civil servants of the country stood at 1,222,947. Malay civil servants grew steadily from 64.5% in 1969/1970 to 77.0% in 2005 to 76.2% in 2009, while the case is vice versa for non-Malays. Chinese and Indian civil servants fell appreciably from 18.4% and 15.7% to 9.4% and 5.1% to 6.0% and 4.1% respectively over the same period (Table 2).

**Table 2: The Malaysian Civil Service by Ethnic Groups, 1969/1970, 2005 & 2009**

	1969/1970*		2005		2009	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Malay	48 946	64.5	692 736	77.0	932 225	76.2
Chinese	13 925	18.4	84 295	9.4	72 875	6.0
Indian	11 893	15.7	46 054	5.1	50 140	4.1
Others**	1 111	1.5	76 165	8.5	167 707	13.7
<b>Total</b>	<b>75 875</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>899 250</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>1 222 947</b>	<b>100</b>

\*In Peninsular Malaysia only

\*\*Mainly other *bumiputras* (natives)

**Source:** Lim (2013, pp. 177, 178, 180, 182 & 183)

Compared to their population, Malays are consistently overrepresented and non-Malays are underrepresented in the civil service. In other words, the Malaysian civil service is increasingly dominated by the Malays. Since the 80s, the government has introduced such major reforms as reorganizations, institutional rejuvenating and revamping, privatization, downsizing, new pay and performance appraisal system, e-government among others, and progress has been recorded in various spheres of the civil service. However, little has been done to rectify the increasingly mono-ethnic civil service. The overrepresentation of Malays in the civil service is a matter of concern today and it is also said to be one of the factors compromising the capacity and hence performance and competitiveness of the civil service (Esman, 1972; Lim, 2010; Siddiquee, 2013).

Discussion of the representativeness of the Malaysian civil service continues to focus on race. However, another aspect of representativeness, namely gender, is also important. Gender ratios in the Malaysian population were about the same over the years of 1970 to 2010. As shown in Table 3, female made up 49.3% to 49.6% in the Malaysian population over the period of 1970-2010.

**Table 3: The Malaysian Population by Gender, 1970, 2000, 2005 & 2010**

	1970 <sup>a</sup>		1980 <sup>b</sup>		1990 <sup>a</sup>		2000 <sup>a</sup>		2005 <sup>c</sup>		2010 <sup>a</sup>	
	N*	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
M	5 517.0	50.7	6 992.0	50.4	9 185.3	50.7	11 170.4	50.6	12 318.3	50.6	13 537.6	50.5
F	5 364.8	49.3	6 887.2	49.6	8 917.1	49.3	10 911.4	49.4	12 043.7	49.4	13 247.3	49.5
<b>T</b>	<b>10 881.8</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>13 879.2</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>18 102.4</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>22 081.8</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>24 362.0</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>26 784.9</b>	<b>100</b>

\*N ('000)

**Sources:** <sup>a</sup> Economic Planning Unit (various years)

<sup>b</sup> Ministry of Women, Family & Community Development (n. d.)

<sup>c</sup> Department of Statistics (2005, p. 37)

Gender representation in the civil service has also caused concern for some time, as shown in the following account by Abdullah, Norma & Abdul (2003, pp. 91-97) of the 1995 recruitment exercise for the PTD. There were 200 vacancies to be filled. The 1,462 eligible applicants consisted of 876 (60%) males and 586 (40%) females. The Public Service Commission complied with departmental requests for more male recruits and followed a gender ratio of four to one in favour of males, but only after “a furious debate” as female applicants “were generally the better performers during the exercise” (Abdullah et al, 2003, p. 96). The preference for males thus entailed a considerable sacrifice of capacity.

Although females have traditionally dominated certain services, such as the teaching, clerical and paramedical services, males have outnumbered females in the overall civil service since independence. However, the share of female civil servants has been increasing as shown in Table 4. This increase has been especially rapid in recent years.

**Table 4: The Malaysian Civil Service by Gender, 2000, 2005 & 2010 (%)**

Service Group	Gender					
	2000		2005		2010	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Top Management	87	13	81	19	73	27
Management & Professional	68	32	48	52	39	61
Support	64	36	62	38	49	51
<b>Total</b>	<b>65</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>59</b>	<b>41</b>	<b>46</b>	<b>54</b>

**Sources:** Public Service Department (2001, p. 4; 2006, pp. 11-12; 2010, p. 177)

The country's population contained 49.4% females however there were only 35% females in the civil service in 2000 (Table 3 and 4). In 2005, female civil servants have increased to 41%. As shown in Table 4, the percentage of female civil servants has increased in all service groups from 2000 to 2010. Especially worth noting is the Management and Professional Group (which requires a degree qualification). In this group, females have overtaken males by 2005. By 2010, females have exceeded males in overall number.<sup>4</sup> The percentages of females in the Management and Professional and Top Management groups have reached 61% and 27% respectively in 2010. In 2004, the Malaysian government has announced its policy to have at least 30% participation of women at decision making positions in the public sector, and the 30% quota has been met in 2013, where women occupied 33.7% of all top management positions in the public sector (UNDP, 2014).

<sup>4</sup> Females have increased not only in the traditionally female-dominated services but also in the PTD and in the medical, legal, engineering and other professional services (Abdullah et al., 2003, pp. 84 & 116).

The increasing number of females in the Management and Professional Group is hardly surprising, as female graduates have outstripped male graduates in numbers in recent years. Male students used to outnumber females in 1970s and 1980s. However, data show that a milestone was reached when females made up 49% of total enrolment in 1990, since then, females gradually exceeded males in local universities, pushing the ratio to 65:35 by 2011 (*Sin Chew Daily*, 2011, September 9). Judging by their enrolment rates in local universities and the increasing number of woman civil servants, the representation of female in the civil service would not be a major concern of the sector. With the continuing preponderance of female graduates and hence applicants for government jobs, the worry has increased whether the number of good male candidates would be enough for maintaining gender representativeness in the civil service or whether capacity has to be sacrificed by taking in less qualified males over more qualified females.

### WHY AREN'T MINORITY BETTER REPRESENTED IN THE MALAYSIAN CIVIL SERVICE?

From discussion of the previous section, it is obvious that generally the major concern and worry over the representativeness of the Malaysian bureaucracy is less on gender but more on (minority) racial group representations. In countries like Malaysia, where race is highly salient, the representativeness of the bureaucracy is likely to have important effects on the responsiveness of the bureaucracy to the various racial groups. A representative civil service is therefore important for ensuring equitable responsiveness to all races. However, the civil service has long been dominated by *bumiputras*, specifically Malays.<sup>5</sup> From time to time, various non-Malay parties have called for a more representative civil service. The reasons for non-*bumiputra* under-representation have also attracted public attention. Despite frequent official denials, it is widely believed that the bureaucracy is not representative because of the policy of racial preference, i.e. for *bumiputras* and especially Malays in both recruitment and promotion.

Racial preference compromises merit criteria and capacity and hence the effectiveness and efficiency of the civil service. According to Means (1986, p. 105), the natural proclivity of the Malaysian government, particularly after the New Economic Policy, is “to fill the positions with Malays if at all possible.” For this, as Esman (1972, p. 75) observed, the country “paid a price in reduced administrative effectiveness” because administrative careers were “denied to many talented non-Malays.” In most countries, entry requirements need to be relaxed for educationally disadvantaged minorities. Thus civil service capacity needs to be sacrificed to secure a representative civil service. However, in Malaysia, the relaxation of merit is for the majority group. Even though the educational achievements of Malays have improved since Esman wrote, Lim (2010, p. 19) argues that racial preference and compromise of merit continues to exact a non-trivial price in capacity and performance, as preference for Malays is for the largest racial group and occurs in virtually all parts and levels of the civil service. Sole or greater emphasis on merit would thus enhance both representativeness and capacity.<sup>6</sup>

However, in recent years many civil service leaders have denied racial preference and maintained that the civil service is entirely based on merit. Instead, it is argued that Chinese and Indians are underrepresented because of their lack of interest in civil service jobs. As support, application figures for recent years have been released. As shown in Table 5, comparatively, the number of applications from non-Malays is much lower than Malays.

<sup>5</sup> Malay overrepresentation is considerably higher at the federal level and at the state level within Peninsular Malaysia. Other *bumiputras* are largely concentrated in the state civil services of Sabah and Sarawak as they prefer to serve in their own states (Lim, 2002: 11-12; Abdullah et al., 2003, p. 83).

<sup>6</sup> Sunway Group corporate adviser Ramon Navaratnam and historian Khoo Khay Kim have called for reverse discrimination or affirmative action for non-Malays to increase their representation in the civil service (*New Straits Times*, 2003, April 29). However, Lim (2010, pp. 33-34) sees reverse discrimination and its compromise of merit as neither desirable nor necessary for the stated purpose.

**Table 5: Public Service Applicants: 2004 – 2013**

	2004 <sup>a</sup>		2006 <sup>a</sup>		2007 <sup>a</sup>		2011 <sup>b</sup>		2013 (Jan-Aug) <sup>b</sup>	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Malay	264 885	79.5	535 766	82.5	631 264	82.7	893 292	79.5	1 567 728	79.7
Chinese	11 369	3.4	11 988	1.8	12 875	1.7	23 547	2.1	38 827	2.0
Indian	9 340	2.8	16 801	2.6	18 553	2.4	36 729	3.3	68 030	3.4
Others*	47 827	14.3	84 810	13.1	100 826	13.2	170 124	15.1	292 659	14.9
<b>Total</b>	<b>333 421</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>649 365</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>763 518</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>1 123 692</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>1 967 244</b>	<b>100</b>

\*Mainly other *bumiputras* (natives)

Sources: <sup>a</sup> Lim (2010, p. 20)

<sup>b</sup> *Sin Chew Daily* (2012, June 7 & 2013, September 11)

Table 5 indicates that even though the number of applicants from all racial groups has increased, Malays consistently account for about 80%, Chinese 1-2% (except for 2004), Indians 2-3%, and Others (mostly other *bumiputras*/natives) 13-14%. The low application rate of non-Malays is often being used to show that Chinese and Indian applicants are not enough for making the civil service more representative. However, Lim (2010, p. 21) points out that it is actual numbers rather than percentages that are important. Table 6 shows the number of public service recruitment from 2004 to 2013.

**Table 6: Public Service Recruitments: 2004 – 2013**

	2004 <sup>a</sup>		2006 <sup>a</sup>		2007 <sup>a</sup>		2011 <sup>b</sup>		2013 (Jan-Aug) <sup>b</sup>	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Malay	4 187	1.6	22 618	4.2	31 675	5.0	28 367	3.2	18 487	1.2
Chinese	841	7.4	1 045	8.7	1 326	10.3	3 686	15.7	1 772	4.6
Indian	568	6.1	1 150	6.8	1 188	6.4	2 316	6.3	1 111	1.6
Others*	806	1.7	3 352	4.0	4 273	4.2	2 441	1.4	4 316	1.5
<b>Total</b>	<b>6 402</b>	<b>1.9</b>	<b>28 165</b>	<b>4.3</b>	<b>38 462</b>	<b>5.0</b>	<b>36 810</b>	<b>3.3</b>	<b>25 686</b>	<b>1.3</b>

\*Mainly other *bumiputras* (natives)

Sources: <sup>a</sup> Lim (2010, p. 20)

<sup>b</sup> *Sin Chew Daily* (2012, June 7&2013, September 11)

Inspecting both Table 5 and Table 6, it is obvious that the number of applicants is very high but the appointment rate is low. From Table 6, the intakes range from 1.2-4.2% for Malays, 4.6-15.7% for Chinese, 1.6-6.8% for Indians, and 1.4-4.2% for others. Lim (2010, p. 21) observes that even for “Chinese and Indians, applicants exceed intake by about 8 and 10 times respectively.” He then argues that “while it is still possible for applicants to be inadequate for some kinds of professional skills that are highly remunerated in the private sector, the above shows that there is no serious shortage of formally (or paper) qualified applicants to the civil service, even from Chinese and Indians.” The worry about applicants can hence “only apply, if at all, to quality and not quantity.” To examine whether it is insufficient quality or qualifications that has prevented the recruitment of Chinese and Indian applicants in greater numbers, as noted by Lim (2010, p.33), requires access to data on applicants of all races that only the recruiting authorities possess.

The “official” argument of inadequate non-Malay applications has raised another question. Why are non-Malay applications low or at least much lower than Malay applications? What factors deter non-Malays from public employment? The official explanation is that non-Malays prefer private employment because of its higher pay (*New Straits Times*, 2005, July 26; *Utusan Malaysia*, 2006, March 24; *Sin Chew Daily*, 2009, December 16). However, another commonly heard reason is Malay preference and it is widely believed to exist not only in recruitment but also in promotion.



Senior positions in the civil service are also overwhelmingly held by Malays. According to N. Siva Subramaniam, the then President of CUEPACS (Congress of Union of Employees in the Public and Civil Service, the umbrella civil service union), only one of the 160 senior education district officers was Chinese in 2001 (*The Sun*, 2001, June 3). Government websites in 2003 showed that only 2 of the 21 posts of Secretary-General (the top post in a Ministry), and only 3 of the 41 posts of Deputy Secretary-General were held by non-Malays (Lim, 2006a). In 2004, there had only been one Chinese in the post of principal matron (the highest post in nursing) since the 50s (*The Sun Weekend*, 2004, December 4-5). In 2006, the then Higher Education Minister Mustapa Mohammed revealed that there was only one non-Malay dean among 20 in University Malaya and in most of the other universities there was none (*The Star*, 2006 August 30). A check on the official websites of the 24 ministries in August 2014, only 5 of the 24 posts of Secretary-General were held by non-Malays—three Chinese, one Sikh and one Eurasian.

When Malays hold the bulk of top positions, non-Malays do not see good prospects in the civil service. Hence, many non-Malay job seekers, Chinese especially, perceive that they would not have fair career advancement in the civil service (*Sin Chew Daily*, 2007, December 23; Woo, 2011, pp. 145-148). As explained by Navaratnam (*The Sun*, 2001, June 3), “If they (i.e. non-Malays) do not see equal opportunities in their career, they might decide against applying for jobs in the public sector to avoid feeling frustrated.” Until today, the negative perception is still prevalent among non-Malays (*Sin Chew Daily*, 2012, June 8 & August 4 & 7).

## CONCLUSIONS

This article shows that even though the history had influence on the running of the Malaysian civil service system, however, changes and adaptations should be made according to new challenges and environments. Representative bureaucracy is a norm in modern democracies. In a modern democracy, people expect to see people who look like them as officials in government agencies. When the facts have shown that racial preference in recruitment and promotion in the Malaysian civil service has compromised the capacity and representativeness, probably it's time to think of a way to rectify the severely ethnic-imbalance civil service.

Malaysia is a country made up of diversity. In an era where diversely talented countries compete against each other in almost all aspects, this diversity should be seen as strength, a rich and powerful resource in search for talents with diverse skills and competencies to develop and enhance the effectiveness and capacity of the country. Increasing the representativeness of the Malaysian civil service not only would ensure equitable responsiveness to all social groups, it would also enhance capacity, legitimacy and acceptance of governmental policies in the heterogeneous society.

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